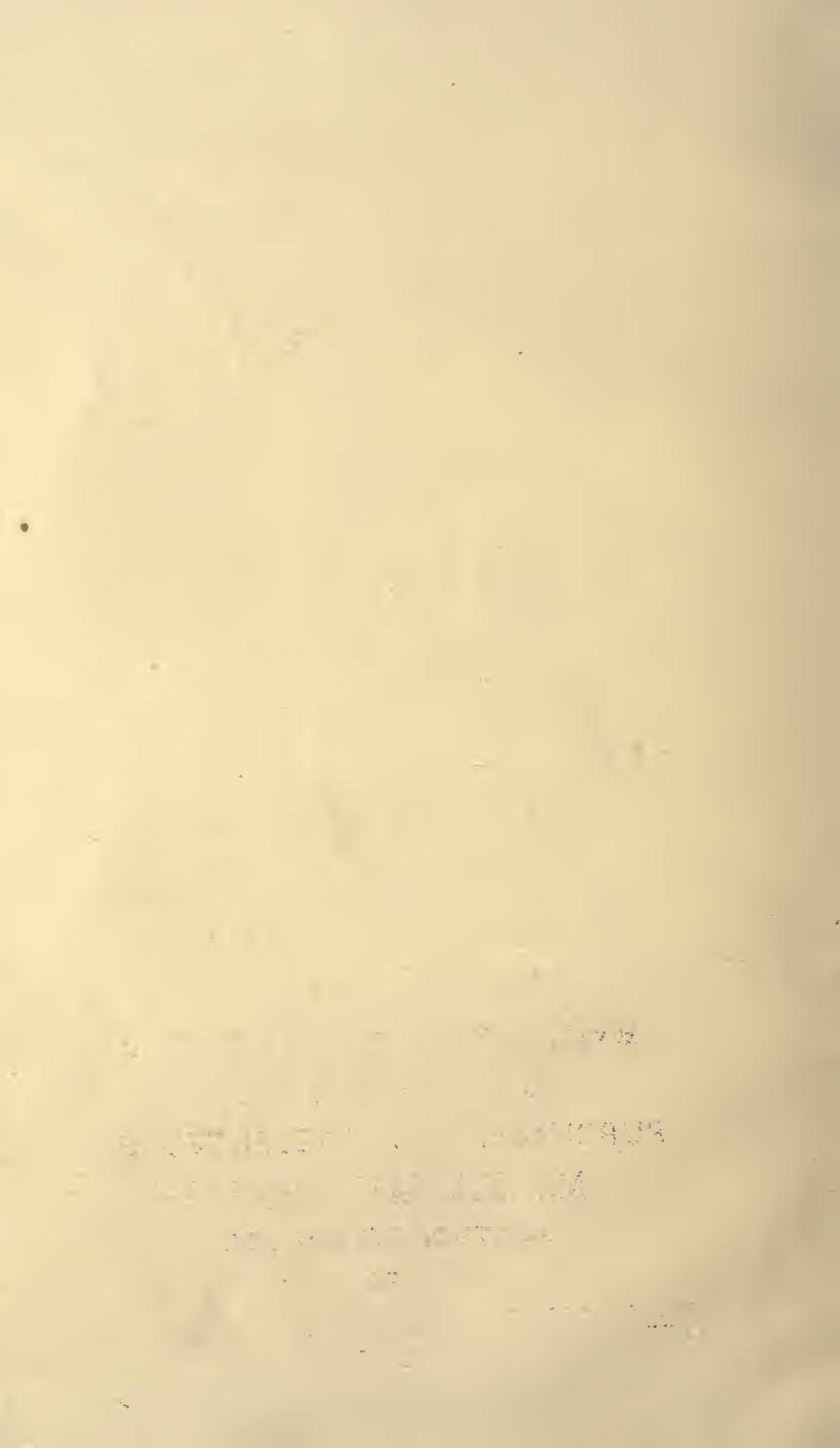


AN ANSWER
TO THE
ESSAYS & REVIEWS

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OF THE LATE
Revd. OWEN THOMAS, D. D.
LIVERPOOL.
PURCHASED AND PRESENTED BY
MR WILLIAM THOMAS,
BOOTLE, LIVERPOOL.
TO
THE THEOLOGICAL COLLEGE,
BALA.
DECEMBER, 1891.

Q9.
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TO THE

ESSAYS AND REVIEWS.

BY

T. COLLYNS SIMON,

AUTHOR OF "THE NATURE AND ELEMENTS OF THE EXTERNAL WORLD,"

"THE MISSION AND MARTYRDOM OF ST. PETER,"

"SCIENTIFIC CERTAINTIES OF PLANETARY LIFE," ETC.

PUBLISHED BY J. H. AND JAMES PARKER,
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1861.

[*The Author reserves the right of translation.*]

ADVERTISEMENT.

THE authors of the *Essays and Reviews* are clearly entitled, as they claim, not to be held responsible for each other's peculiar views. In the following pages, therefore, only those principles are imputed to them which are common to them all, and which exist, with but little difference of expression, in all their articles.

AN ANSWER
TO THE
ESSAYS AND REVIEWS.

THE theory propounded by the writers of the *Essays and Reviews* is simply this—that there are in Scripture several statements of doctrine and of fact which Christians are not bound, by reason and conscience, to interpret literally.

The motive for propounding this theory is, as the writers themselves declare, and as from their character and position we have every reason to believe, to induce more persons to trust the Scriptures than at present trust them, and to induce more persons to be Christians at heart than at present are so.

No one can deny the excellence of this motive. All that we have any reason to question is, whether the argument assigned for this mode of interpreting Scripture is really founded in reason and enlightenment, or whether it is not, on the contrary, founded

wholly on inaccurate data of interpretation, and on an utter misconception of philosophical facts.

What, then, is the argument assigned for not interpreting Scripture literally? It is this:—that there are several facts and doctrines therein stated which, when so interpreted, are stumbling-blocks to a large proportion of educated men, *i.e.*, facts which, with our previous belief and assumptions, appear to us to be, each of them, a contradiction in terms, and doctrines which are contrary to what our reason and experience would have led us to anticipate.

The question at issue, therefore, is this: When we meet with facts and doctrines in Scripture which appear to us improbable, or even impossible, are we exempted from the literal interpretation of them merely on that account?—merely because they appear to us contrary to what our previous convictions and assumptions exhibit to us as probable or as possible?

The answer to this question clearly is, as the Essayists themselves admit, that everything depends upon what these previous convictions and assumptions are, and whether we have thoroughly and unequivocally ascertained their accuracy. How, then, does the matter stand in this respect? What are those previous convictions and assumptions which are supposed to make certain facts and doctrines

seem improbable? To men of duly advanced intellect like the Essayists, what are they?

Upon the closest search, their writings exhibit but one only—that, certainly, one of vast dimensions—viz., that God Himself cannot perform a miracle! much less enable any one else to do so! This is, they tell us, that firm conviction, that irresistible assumption upon their minds which obliges them, and some other learned men, to conclude that it never was intended that we should interpret Scripture literally. Under this assumption, it becomes necessary for them to explain the statements of miracles in some other way than by facts; and this being the case with these statements, there are, they consider, no grounds for a literal interpretation of any other Scriptural statement, especially where the literal sense is repugnant to other beliefs and assumptions of the interpreter. The whole theory of interpretation, therefore, propounded by the Essayists, depends upon the truth or falsehood of this remarkable conviction; and to state this, which is attested by every page they have written, is alone a sufficient refutation of that theory. But I propose further, as briefly as possible, to enable those who are interested in the subject, to see distinctly the philosophical misconceptions in which the above assumption originates, and to see distinctly also,

that, however extraordinary it may be that men otherwise shrewd and learned should have fallen into such misconceptions, it was not from any bias unfriendly to the Christian faith, but, on the contrary, rather from anxiety about its reception among some classes of the community, that they have done so. And I undertake this task the more cheerfully because I can hope—wild though such hopes may appear to some—that it will not be difficult to induce men so zealous as most of them are in the search for what is true, to reconsider the elementary assumptions which result in a conviction, to say the least of it, so very unphilosophical as that here pointed out.

We must not be tempted by the impetuous language of some critics to think of these writers as infidels and atheists. They are not either one or the other. Some unaccountable misconceptions, indeed, involved in their views of Natural Philosophy, and which can easily be shown to be misconceptions, are incompatible with men's natural belief in a present God. But as these writers are all of them firm believers in that Presence, and (what is alone of any moment in that belief) hourly in the habit of contemplating the acts in nature as His acts, the discussion of these errors may be postponed to a later page, convinced, as all must be,

that men so earnest and so intelligent will not hesitate to abandon them on account of the incompatibility alluded to, as well as on account of their philosophical inaccuracy.

The Essayists go farther with us, however, than merely admitting that there is all this conscious action of a present God around us. They are Christians as we are. They hold that since there is this present Agent extensively, and minutely, and constantly occupied about us, it is not in the smallest degree improbable that He should design to reveal things to us at one stage of our development as a race, although not at another,—things connected with our happiness,—things that, without this act upon His part, we could no more have imagined than we could a sound or a colour, if He had not given us ears or eyes,—things neither to be learned from material things nor from our own feelings or thoughts; for this is what is meant by a Revelation from that mighty Agent of Nature. They hold that His making such a Revelation is not in the smallest degree improbable. Nay, further, they hold with us that He has done so; that He has made this Revelation. But they go farther with us even than this. They hold that as this mighty Personal Agent designed to reveal a portion of our existence to us in this way, it is not in the smallest degree

improbable that He should have, for that purpose, adopted human means, *i. e.*, human writings and human agents, and all the other circumstances of humanity. Nay, further, they hold with other Christians that He has done this also, and they point to our present Scriptures as the documents He has used for perpetuating among us the knowledge of this Revelation, and to the individuals therein mentioned, as the human agents employed by Him in that transaction. Up to that point the Essayists agree with us.

It will be well to bring all these facts carefully to the consideration of the subject now before us, and not for an instant lose sight of one of them ;—that these writers believe in God's incessant occupation about us, and in His having, by human documents and human agents, disclosed to us matters above and beyond all human knowledge,—therefore of a superhuman character, and relating to a state of things above and beyond all that we could see in nature,—therefore supernatural,—“ Divine Mysteries,” as they truly call them ; and that in all this they not only see nothing in the smallest degree improbable, but see what clearly and beyond all manner of doubt the Almighty Agent in nature has consciously and designedly done for the human race. Let us, I say, bear these facts well in mind, or we shall

not understand what the Essayists propose, but mistake, on the contrary, the whole question between us and them,—our own position as well as theirs.

The first topic on which they diverge from the ordinary Christian principles is as to the amount of human error which the Great Author of Revelation has allowed to enter into the human documents and the human agents employed by Him in the foregoing operation. It is evident that He would allow no error to enter into them that would obstruct the knowledge He intended thereby to impart. Even in this the Essayists agree with us; and the question, “Did He allow no error at all to enter?” is not raised; because it is distinctly admitted on all hands, that the means employed are human means, and nothing human is exempt from error; and even if we had no others, there are errors of translation and errors of manuscript, however unimportant, that are necessarily inherent in documents of human manufacture; and there is the error in Judas, and those in Peter, and occasionally in other Apostles, which abundantly indicate the ordinary human liability to error in all these instruments of the Divine disclosures.

Let us now attend to the theory of the Essayists upon this point; *i.e.*, the result, in presence of these facts, of all their antecedent convictions,

apprehensions, and assumptions respecting God and what God would do. They hold then (and that with the utmost candour) that God has allowed the largest amount of human error to enter into our Christian and Jewish documents that can possibly enter into any human documents whatever;—that as far as the history is concerned, we can only reckon upon very little of it as authentic; yet that even all this does not obstruct the information which our Great Informant intended to impart; that the facts and history are no part of the Revelation from on high; that the doctrine of Scripture is that alone which was revealed or is important; that even that, however, as it there stands, is so covered over with human errors and human thoughts that the casual observer could never find it; and that it is only by prayer and by the teaching of God's Spirit within us that we can hope to extricate or understand it; but that by these means this can be done, and its Divine truth completely appreciated. They say that when the Bible is interpreted as any other book, and all the improbable and impossible statements which there present themselves as such to our previous conceptions of God and Nature, taken into account, this is the result, and they invite us to declare how and why we interpret it differently.

What, we are asked, do *we* mean by “inspired” writings, and how do *we* profess to interpret them? It is not on either of these points that the rest of the Christian world differs materially from the Essayists. By inspired writings we only mean, as they do, those that are employed by our Maker in preserving the knowledge of His Revelation among mankind; and we interpret these writings, as they profess to do, precisely as we do any other book; the only difference between us and the Essayists being this, that whereas we look upon doctrines and facts which would appear to us extraordinary and improbable if unconnected with an immediate communication from the Great Agent in nature, as neither extraordinary nor improbable when in connexion with one,—what in fact it was only natural to expect in connexion with one; the Essayists, on the other hand, look upon all such teachings and events as being quite as extraordinary and improbable in connexion with such a communication as not in connexion with one. Improbability is a relative term. What is probable in one case is not so in another. Notwithstanding therefore all that is found in Scripture of a supernatural, or, humanly speaking, improbable nature either in fact or doctrine, we, nevertheless, expect to find these documents as much in accordance with fact

as those documents that are most so among profane ones,—as much in accordance with fact, for instance, as the writings of Thucydides or Tacitus are (although it would be by no means essential that they should be so much so),—and regard them as so, except where we find that inaccuracies either of fact or doctrine have crept in.

If, in direct contradiction to such a course, we allow ourselves to assume from some physical or metaphysical conceptions of our own that there is, not as much, but as little of fact in the history of our Lord and His Apostles, for instance, as it is possible for there to be in any human document, this is certainly *not* treating the Scripture like any other book, but upon a totally different principle; and much the same as if we should assume that the *Life of Agricola*, by Tacitus, for instance, was a romance, and not to be relied upon in anything except where it was corroborated by other testimony. Surely this would not be treating the *Life of Agricola* as any other book. We don't read every book purporting to exhibit an entirely new transaction with a strong bias against the truth of every statement which it contains, merely because some of the statements are contrary to our own assumptions, and others of them appear not to agree among themselves. I do not say that some

people would not do so ; I only mean that people generally do not, and that especially no conscientious and earnest enquirer into the truth of that transaction, as the Essayists are into the truth of Revelation, would ever consent to doing so.

The Essayists themselves admit that our conduct in such cases is always determined by the previous beliefs and assumptions of the parties. There is no principle that they more frequently insist upon than this, and it is entitled to all the importance that they attach to it. Those previous beliefs and assumptions constitute, in all cases, fully one-half of the evidence. It is clear, then, that before we enter on the study of any book, especially one that we all admit has “ come in some sense from God,” it is of the highest importance that we should scrutinize with the utmost severity our previous beliefs and assumptions against the truth of what we there find stated—see what they are founded on and whether upon anything—especially see whether we have arrived at them by careful thought ourselves, or whether we have unconsciously imbibed them from hostile critics. It is so that we should study the history of Thucydides or the *Life of Agricola*. It is so that we should study the Scriptures. This is what is meant by interpreting them like any other book, and this we

are prepared to show the Essayists that, in the most important particulars, they are not doing;—nay, that there is good reason for their suspecting that their antecedent apprehensions on the subject have been unconsciously derived from the philosophical sophistry of those who are not aware, as prayer and study have rendered us, that the book has come in any sense at all from God, or even that there is any God at all from whom it could have come. And we cannot doubt that they will honestly listen to us. Surely when a Christian of information and intelligence assumes for any reason that there is not as much, but as little of true history in the narrative of the Evangelists as it is possible for us to meet with in any profane narrative whatever, and finds himself in consequence reduced to suppose that perhaps the record of Revelation is but a sort of allegory or parable, exhibiting the Revelation indeed which God intended, but not at all a history of real facts occurring in connexion with that Revelation — when an earnest, pious, and enlightened Christian is in such a predicament, it surely becomes him to examine well those philosophical reasonings and assumptions which have driven him to this, and which he has allowed to take such hold upon his mind.

Have the Essayists done this? If so, how does

it happen that their work exhibits no discussion or analysis of these reasonings and of these assumptions?—no distinct statement of what they are?—no distinct justification of them? How does it happen that this, which is by far the most important portion of the whole subject which they propose to us, is the only point connected with it which they keep out of sight?

They cannot of course pretend that the four considerations which they have placed before us, as calculated to suggest to others the same convictions as they entertained respecting the inaccuracy of a literal interpretation, were those that also influenced them and suggested theirs. This, in the case of men so discerning as they are, it is impossible to imagine; nor is it too much to say that no one, whatever may have been his capacity, was ever made by any of these four considerations, to feel the alleged general conviction that Scripture need not be interpreted literally. The cause here indicated could never have produced the effect ascribed to it.

The four considerations to which I allude are—
1 Our theory of astronomy. 2. Our theories of geology. 3. The figurative language of Eastern countries. 4. The improbable results frequently derived from the literal interpretation. Of all these, it is asserted that they produce an irresistible as-

sumption and conviction in most men—in all men, the Essayists sometimes say—that Scripture need never have this literal interpretation. Let us examine each point separately.

1. I admit at once that if the facts of astronomy were inconsistent with the letter of the inspired description in Genesis, it would be necessary to interpret that description with the requisite latitude; but I deny that this could be regarded as a general precedent for deviating from the literal interpretation of our Scriptures. No such latitude, however, is required in the case in question. The palpable incongruity, it is, indeed, said, which subsists between our undisputed theory of astronomy and the literal language of Genesis, convinces most people, with a force every day more and more overwhelming, that the literal sense of Scripture is nowhere the true one. Yet what is this incongruity? There is no distinction made by the Inspired Writer between that part of the sky which is called “atmosphere,” and that part beyond which is not called atmosphere! Moses calls them both “heaven,” and both “the firmament!” Will the Essayists inform us what palpable incongruity any reasonable person can see here between the fact and the description? What makes them imagine that a thing of this kind would ever create, among either

the enlightened or the unenlightened, the slightest suspicion, much less a conviction insurmountable, that Scripture need never be interpreted literally?

2. On the facts of geology there is very little difference of opinion among mankind; on the theories proposed for these facts the difference of opinion is very great. There are, however, two general ways in which it is possible to account for the facts:—one, upon the principle of vast time and little convulsion; the other, on that of little time and vast convulsion. Even if we agree with one theorist that a billion years of such physical events as are now occurring would account for our geological phenomena, we are not thereby debarred from agreeing quite as fully with his opponent that a three months' convulsion of the planet and its waters would have produced them. The question is really one of possibility much more than of probability, and the evidence for the latter theory, even in point of probability, is quite as strong as, if not stronger than, the evidence for the former. But what “settled” convictions have the possibilities or probabilities of these geological hypotheses created in the mind of any man, enlightened or unenlightened, Christian or not Christian? The Essayists seem to think that “most” well-instructed men are convinced not only of the probability, but

of the "certainty" of the long-period theories. There is, however, nothing of the kind. There can be little doubt that the contrary is the fact, and that most men who thoroughly and independently investigate this question for themselves (and none others are "well instructed" in the matter), find *all* the evidence of probability in favour of the short-period theories. But even if it be true that any considerable number of theorists require to interpret Scripture with sufficient latitude to let in the long-period theories, all such are well aware (as well aware as the Essayists themselves), that there can be no logical inference from this circumstance against the necessity of a literal interpretation for all the rest of Scripture.

3. It is alleged that the Oriental modes of expression that pervade Scripture have convinced enlightened men that they are not bound to interpret any of its expressions literally, and that this conviction is with such men one that cannot be so easily got rid of. There can be no doubt that this also is a misapprehension on the part of the Essayists. It is never so that any men ever judge of Oriental writings. These constantly contain history and principles, which nevertheless men of intellect and experience never think of interpreting in the vague way here attributed to them; nor is there anything in the

slightest degree to this effect suggested by the Oriental expressions to be met with in our Scriptures.

4. Much is also said of the improbable nature of some literal interpretations as put forward by particular Christian societies, and of the effect of such, as instinctively disinclining all men to accept literal interpretations, and disturbing the faith of those who do accept them. Now, it cannot be denied that individuals and communities misinterpret Scripture, and that these misinterpretations exhibit unnecessary improbabilities to believers. But that is not the question. No one objects to an earnest criticism of Scripture, however free. The question is, Do most men consider an extraordinary doctrine in Scripture as incredible, merely because it is extraordinary? Would they consider themselves justified in having recourse at once, on this account, to figurative and mystical interpretations? The Essayists themselves seem to feel that this would be wrong; but they write as if they thought that the great bulk of well-instructed men felt otherwise. Are they sure of this? Are not all such men, on the contrary, well convinced that they should rather analyse those beliefs and those assumptions of theirs to which the literal interpretation is repugnant, and rely rather upon finding the solution of the improbability in the removal of these beliefs and these

assumptions than in abandoning the literal interpretation? For how can the mere improbability of a doctrine in a Revelation from God constitute an objection to it in the mind of any man of clear, unbiassed intellect? Since it is certain that God has disclosed something to us which we could not discover either from natural objects and their laws, or from our own feelings and thoughts, is it not highly probable that the disclosures made will contain information very extraordinary and very different from what we should have expected?—things highly improbable, I mean, *à priori*, and things supernatural? I might go further and ask how could it possibly be otherwise? How could a Revelation rendered necessary by the very fact of its being above the laws of nature and above the laws of mind, and so, inaccessible to us by ordinary means, fail to contain things supernatural and, in any other book, improbable? This, I think, must be evident to everybody; and the reflection, if just, puts an end at once to all objections to doctrine on the mere score of improbability. Does it not also put an end to the reasonableness of supposing that any considerable number of the ignorant or the learned among us have had their faith impaired or hindered by the so-called improbabilities of the literal interpretation?

But although the Essayists seem to indicate the foregoing considerations as what might have formed the belief and assumptions of others rather than their own, with regard to the literal interpretation of Scripture, yet there is one subject on which they profess to share the belief and assumptions of others, and on which that belief and those assumptions are described as insuperable, I mean miraculous action of all kinds ; and as this subject is clearly at the root of the whole theory of the Essayists, it is proposed here to examine the grounds of these antecedent apprehensions by which miracles are rendered incredible to them, and, as they think, to so many other highly educated Christians.

These grounds, as they timidly, and indistinctly, and almost unconsciously indicate them, are the *quasi*-philosophical notions about all causation being physical, and all liberty being compulsion—notions sometimes advanced by those who are not Christians, as the most recent suggestions (for arguments they are not) against the possibility of supernatural action on the part of God. The Essayists themselves do not discuss these points at all, nor suggest to us either why they adopt them, or how they connect them with the impossibility in question. I shall endeavour to supply this defect.

But, first, it is necessary to make very clear, a

distinction which has been too much neglected by all writers on this subject.

There are two ideas among Christians respecting God. One is, that He never leaves the universe one instant to itself; that it would be physically impossible for Him to do so—just as it would be impossible for Him to make a square circle, or to make something conscious and unconscious at the same time; that, on the contrary, the universe, with every minutest portion of it, and its laws, is being constantly maintained around us by His personal, present management; that without a separate, and personal, and conscious act upon His part, not the smallest event in nature could take place, nor nature itself exist; that what are commonly thought of as the laws of nature are in reality nothing else but the uniformity, in each case, and regularity of His separate acts, and that what are commonly thought of as the powers of nature are nothing, in fact, more or less, than the powers which He chooses to employ in this uniform and regular manner; that all this multiplicity of action, of attention, and of thought, involves not the smallest imaginable amount of toil or perplexity to one Omnipotent; that what we call nature cannot subsist one instant without it all; that even the commonest pebble or blade of grass would instantly

vanish out of existence if He forgot it ; that it is nothing but a mere figure, and a very inaccurate one, derived from the analogy of human management, to speak of One who is Omnipotent as *delegating* His power to any one or anything else, as a being of limited capacity can do and must do ; for, that, although His acts may be delegated to another will as the cause of them, or to a merely inanimate object as the occasion of them, it is clear that unless the Author of Nature furnished the means and power upon each occasion, the effect in neither case could be produced ; that if I raise my hand, it is *my* act, inasmuch as I designed to do it ; but that however much I designed to do it, I could not have carried out my design, if God forgot or did not choose at the necessary moment to furnish me with the necessary means ; for, that some exerted power, which I am conscious was not mine, caused the hand to be raised when I designed to raise it ; further, that all nature, and the laws in it, are being thus produced incessantly, and with an obvious special reference to the human heart and the human intellect, in whatever part of the universe such things exist—to their faculties and their wants ; that all our thoughts, and feelings, and acts are of such a nature that unless He knew of them and remembered them, and was conscious of them, it

would be physically impossible for them to exist at all; that all of them that is ours, is the designing and intending process of which we are conscious; that the rest is His; and that all these points, moreover, always instinctively believed by pious and enlightened minds, are now capable of being proved beyond all doubt by scientific research, and are so proved in the works of several writers.

The other notion of God among Christians is almost the exact contrary of all this. It is that He has nothing now whatever to do with what we call nature, *i.e.*, the material universe; that He created it once for all in the first instance, implanting in it certain laws, and investing it with certain powers, and then left it to itself (some even thinking that it subsists in this way from all eternity to all eternity); that it is not God that sustains it, that it sustains itself; that it is not He that produces its changes, that it produces them itself; that He is not at all occupied about it; that, having delegated to it His own powers of action, He never exercises any control over it; that to do so would be to contradict Himself—to overpower Himself, which, of course, would be plainly impossible: that therefore any suspension of nature's laws by the Almighty would be a physical impossibility; that nature cannot alter herself, any more than she can be altered by the Almighty; that equipped as she

now is, she could go on subsisting and producing all her own development, if there was no God at all in existence ; that, in fact, as far as she is concerned, there is not ; that He is nevertheless to be supposed existing, but that the only present or future sphere of His power is a moral one, the only act of His that we are now at all able to observe, being an occasional influence upon our own minds and feelings in reply to prayer ; that the laws of nature, as they are called, are really not “ laws ” at all (a term which implies the act of a conscious agent), but merely sequences in which the first member and the second member are immutably consorted, and could not possibly have been created to exist in any other way ; that, although these principles do not admit of any positive proof, and are very imperfectly known to us, they are nevertheless found to approve themselves to some highly cultivated minds and duly advanced intellects—especially to such as have made their studies of nature without reference to its being the work of a conscious personal Agent, and without any particular bias that way.

The same distinction has been thus otherwise expressed :—

“ There are in modern times but three classes of
“ those who think upon the origin of natural
“ objects. One class of thinking men hold that
“ each of the heavenly bodies has been separately

“ and absolutely created out of nothing by the
“ Almighty, in such a special sense that every one
“ of these bodies is just *as* and just *where* He
“ intended it should be, and that if He could be
“ supposed to have forgotten any one of them, or
“ not to have been actually and separately occupied
“ about each of them, they could not have begun
“ their present existence ; nor could they even now
“ continue to exist as they do (either by means of a
“ system of laws, or in any other way), if this same
“ sort of minute care and attention were not now
“ unintermittingly continued. Another class hold
“ that this distribution of care is in the last degree
“ incredible, and that therefore the creation of the
“ material universe was otherwise conducted. They
“ hold that the Almighty created in the first
“ instance, in this way, out of nothing, and by a
“ distinct act of attention, an immense quantity of
“ nebulous matter (some speak of it as ‘ fire-mist ’ or
“ ‘ star-dust ’) in a chaotic state ; that this chaotic
“ mass once created could maintain its own existence,
“ without any further thought or care on the part of
“ the Creator, and that He invested this matter while
“ in this chaotic state with certain star-making,
“ sun-making, planet-making, plant-making, and
“ animal-making (some even think spirit-making)
“ powers, which should render it perfectly inde-
“ pendent of this constant supervision, through

“ every its minutest operation ; and that, having
“ done this, He abandoned it to its self-develop-
“ ment, in such a sense that it neither receives nor
“ needs any subsequent care or attention upon His
“ part, and could exist even if He could be supposed
“ to forget its existence. According to these
“ writers, no star and no planet resulted in any part
“ of space from His immediate and direct intention,
“ but in some unexplained way from a contest or
“ agreement between the planet-making and the
“ star-making powers. A third class, unable to
“ think that God either wholly watches, or wholly
“ neglects His creation, hold an opinion which they
“ mistakenly believe to lie between these two.
“ They hold that He in the first instance indeed
“ created a chaotic mass of matter, and implanted in
“ it the above powers and laws, or others pro-
“ ductive of the same effects ; but that, instead of
“ abandoning it to the self-development of these
“ powers and laws, He not only, to a certain extent,
“ maintains the existence every instant, of the
“ whole mass, but to a certain extent also superin-
“ tends and appoints its every individual act, in
“ every part of the universe at the same moment,
“ and that if He did not to some extent do this,
“ these laws would not be fully observed, nor these
“ powers fully act, and the chaotic mass itself
“ become more chaotic.”

To which we may add the following:—

“ Again, if there be any truth in the proposition
“ that all the real objects of sense are results pro-
“ duced within the human mind by the immediate
“ action of a superhuman spirit without the aid or
“ agency of any intervening substance of any kind,
“ then not only does this principle furnish the
“ directest and clearest evidence of which the thing
“ is capable, that God is constantly present with us
“ and constantly occupied about us; but also makes
“ out that that presence and that that occupation
“ are more immediate, and in that respect more
“ like these things in a fellow-creature, than men—
“ even pious men—are in the habit of supposing
“ them to be. Now, to say nothing of many other
“ important particulars in which religion is affected
“ by such a doctrine, what stronger motive to piety
“ can there be, than the intimate knowledge of this
“ fact from demonstrations and common sense?
“ Or what greater source of resignation in our
“ more trying hours than to know upon this most
“ unquestionable evidence of which truth is sus-
“ ceptible, that every event independent of our own
“ will not only comes to us from the hands of God,
“ but comes, moreover, in the same direct and
“ immediate manner from Him, and with the same
“ unintermitted attention and intention, on His

“ part, throughout the minutest details of daily
“ life, as are required for maintaining the feels and
“ colours of his sensible creation within such a
“ substance as mind is? Who that understands it,
“ can say that, this is unimportant knowledge?
“ Who that understands it, can say that,
“ when he neglects such knowledge, he does
“ not neglect one of the talents God has given
“ him — one, perhaps, of the most important
“ points of science that are adapted to, or intended
“ for mankind? To believe what cannot be known,
“ is often virtue; but, to exact belief in spiritual
“ matters where knowledge is attainable, is creating
“ an unnecessary difficulty in religion—a difficulty
“ which God has not left us to contend with, and
“ which, in this case at least, it only requires a
“ little attention to remove.”

The reader will see at once from the foregoing what is meant by saying that this conscious, present, personal God, with whom our understandings make us acquainted, is the sole immediate Agent in nature, or that He is not so. I am not here laying down the data for either view. I am merely pointing out the views themselves, and the wide difference that there is between them.

Now it is very difficult to say from their book which of these views the Essayists adopt. One of

them, indeed, seems to express himself as often in favour of one view as of the other. At one moment he speaks of, as facts, the "self-sustaining and self-evolving powers which pervade all nature;" and seems to ridicule the notion of those who pretend to prove "that there must be a constantly acting moving force to keep the solar system going," and "that the whole of nature is like a mill which cannot go on without the continual application of a moving power." At another he condemns those who deny miracles merely because they find law and uniformity to be everywhere God's constant mode of operation as far as their experience extends, and adds that "all such theistic reasonings are but one-sided, and must lead to a denial of all actual operation of the Deity whatever" (p. 114). And the other Essayists nowhere distinctly controvert this latter view. It will probably, therefore, be more just to assume that all the Essayists are among those Christians who consider it as fully proved by science and philosophy that God is the sole immediate Agent in nature; in other words, that every act in nature is the conscious, and personal, and immediate act of God.

And even if this is a mistaken impression respecting the opinion of the Essayists on this point, the mistake would be of no consequence in

the present discussion, for we at once frankly admit that if the immediate agent in nature were not a conscious agent, all miracle would be (as the Essayists say it is) physically impossible; and would likewise be perfectly useless; for the only assigned motive for a miracle in the present case, is to indicate the authorization of a conscious Agent, and this could never be done through the acts of an unconscious one. Such a miracle, under such circumstances, would, we all acknowledge, be perfectly useless as well as perfectly impossible. If the Essayists who, all of them, condemn the belief in miracles, could show that the acts in nature were unconscious and mediate, they could, in a few words, have made out their whole case, and have proved at once both this uselessness and this impossibility, which, in their pages, are not proved at all, nor made at all probable, but only set forth as dogmas. For this reason, also, we may confidently assume that all the Essayists hold the acts in nature to be—even the minutest of them—conscious acts—the immediate and sole acts of a personal, present, conscious, attentive God.

1. And this being the case, I now ask, first, what is meant in the *Essays and Reviews* by saying that it would be impossible for such a God, however much He might wish to do so, to refrain from

carrying out, even in a single instance, any of those laws by which He acts in nature?—in short, to act differently at one moment from what He does at another? Has He no power of choice as we have? Yet how could He have given us our faculty of choice if He possessed none such Himself? Or do the Essayists pretend to say, with the more superficial metaphysicians, that we also are unable in any case to do as we like, or, as it is expressed, to exercise a free volition—that, though we are conscious of being able to do so, we really are unable? Can it be possible that they mean to tell us of all men whose intellects are “duly advanced,” that this is a common conviction among such men? The Essayists are very far from making this assertion in distinct terms, and a few disconnected expressions, scattered here and there throughout the volume, that might bear this sense, do not justify us in attributing the notion to them. For how can we suppose that they arrive at their conclusion as follows:—“We know “that we cannot do anything whatever as we like “(though we are conscious that we can). We therefore assume that God cannot. It would, therefore, be physically impossible for Him to suspend, “even in a single case, one of those laws by which “He acts, merely because He chose to do so?” The utter absurdity of such an argument must make

us unwilling to impute it to the Essayists, although it is that of the writers whose general principles of philosophy they adopt—the writers, I mean, who hold that there is no such thing at all possible as liberty—that all is compulsion.

The only other ground that their pages suggest to us for their supposing miracles impossible to God, is as completely a misconception as the preceding. The mind is conscious of its own acts. It is conscious that these acts are caused by itself, and not by anything else. We suppose the same consciousness to be in other minds, and we attribute the same to God. This is the strict sense of the term "causation," and from it we see that there can be no causation where there is no intention. But the sequences which result from the uniform laws according to which God acts are also spoken of, but inaccurately and figuratively, as causes and effects, and as exhibiting in each sequence an instance of causation, although, as all such phenomena are incapable of intending or designing anything, it is clear that they cannot cause anything in the true sense of that term—the sense with which consciousness makes us acquainted. The less profound school of metaphysicians, moreover, mistakenly hold that these sequences of God's acts, following one another in this way, exhibit causation among themselves

exactly as we are conscious that the mind and its acts do, and still more unaccountably hold that those sequences are the only kind of things that can at all be spoken of as causes and effects, and that no spirit, either finite or infinite, could cause anything. In consequence of this very loose way of looking at things, and reasoning about them, this class of philosophers consider that every act of ours, whether we are conscious of it or not, must thus have its place in a physical sequence, over which no mind can have any control, and which no mind can cause. This is the misconception which the Essayists seem to have adopted, and from which they derive their strange theory about the physical impossibility of miracles. "It is not the mere fact (say they), but the cause or explanation of it, which is the point at issue." And, again: "No *physical* fact can be conceived as unique and without relation to others, and to the whole system of natural causes"—*i.e.*, there can be no interposition of design, or intention, or mind at all in the production of phenomena. Further, they describe themselves as having "learned to recognise the impossibility of any modification whatsoever in the existing conditions of material agents, unless through the invariable operation of a series of eternally-impressed consequences, following in

“ some *necessary* chain of orderly connexion, *however imperfectly known to us.* ” So that, according to this fantastic theory, the slightest miracle (*i.e.*, the slightest interference of the Supreme Mind) would burst the mighty chain which keeps matter bound, and instantly break up the universe. We cannot wonder that men who reasoned thus should have scruples about admitting the physical practicability of miracles, and should have endeavoured to persuade their fellow-men that the errors of the Christian *narrative* in this respect cast no discredit on the *doctrines* involved. But can it be possible that this is what the Essayists mean? Could men so intelligent as they are, so well-informed, and with such correct notions of what God is, determine, for such a reason as that above indicated, that all miracles are utterly impracticable, that the Scripture statements of them, therefore, are incredible, and that the remainder of the Christian narrative is consequently to be regarded with suspicion, or rather as an allegory or parable enveloping the doctrines? and all that, I repeat, on account of a grotesque misconception of what the true nature of causation is? It is unnecessary to dwell upon this misconception, or to expose further its utter want of philosophy and truth. It is enough to say of it that, like the preceding one, it is plainly incompatible

with those ideas of God which we attribute to the Essayists, for it denies that nature is administered to us by a conscious Agent, or that, in fact, there is any conscious Agent at all connected with nature. We have already admitted that, upon this latter supposition, all miraculous action in nature would be utterly impossible and inconceivable, and we have refrained from attributing the supposition to the Essayists. Yet they assign no other grounds for their assumption, except such as lead to this. They merely reiterate the "impossibility" and the "inconceivableness" of there being a God who could perform a miracle. They surely, however, cannot object to explain, in a distinct and unequivocal manner, upon what grounds they think the thing impossible and inconceivable. It is an intrinsic portion of their theory. I might almost say it is the whole of it. Why is this the only thing they say nothing about? Until they have explained this, their intimate friends may perhaps know and understand why they think miracles impracticable, and why, therefore, they hold that the Scripture narrative should be considered unauthentic, but no stranger can be expected to see this. The public cannot see it, and are unwilling to attribute to them the extremely unphilosophical assumptions about "all liberty being compulsion," and "all

causation being physical,” which are hinted at throughout their pages, and are all that is hinted at in explanation of their theory. It is not too much, perhaps, to hope that they will yet lay a full statement of their reasons upon this point before the public, and that these reasons will prove, if not more correct, at least more plausible, and less superficial than those their pages suggest. The more enlightened and profoundly philosophical men are, the more firm is their conviction that all liberty is not compulsion, and that all causation is not physical; that the Great Agent in nature could therefore perform miracles to any extent He might think proper; that there is no physical impossibility at all in the matter; that, since it has been indisputably ascertained that the acts in nature are conscious acts, the physical impossibility lies all the other way—all that is physically impossible being that He should *not* be able to do so.

2. The proposition of the Essayists is, that miracles can be shown to be impracticable to God. They do not go beyond this. They do not say that if they can be shown to be practicable they would nevertheless be in all cases unlikely to be employed; nor do they say that, if they were both practicable and in any given case likely to be employed, they

would in that case be more incredible in history than any ordinary events. It is most important that these distinctions should be well borne in mind respecting miracles (their practicability—the probability of their being employed, and the credibility of their history), and that it should also be borne in mind that the Essayists deny only the first. The practicability of miracles to the Almighty was never called in question by any class of writers until now, not even by Atheists, for these always admitted that if there was a God, He could perform miracles, and this has led most people to mistake what the Essayists do call in question, and makes many suppose that they were only at the old work of denying the Scripture statements. But although they do not carry their denial any further than the one point, it is desirable to *show*, in this place, both that they do not and that they could not. They tell us, and most truly so, that in judging of probabilities our judgment depends entirely on the previous belief and assumptions with which we approach the consideration of them. In this case of miracles, for instance, their physical possibility being once ascertained, a person in the hourly habit of thinking of God as of the only Agent in nature, and of nature as a perfectly arbitrary appointment of His, with which He is incessantly occupied, and occupied with,

moreover, in constant reference to the reasoning faculties of His creatures, would much more easily see the probability of miracles taking place on any given occasion, than a person would who, although admitting miracles to be possible to God, had no such previous convictions on other points—who had been, on the contrary, always accustomed every hour of his life to think of all acts *in* nature as acts *of* nature, and therefore as unconscious acts, and of nature herself as of something quite independent of God, and of God as of a Being not incessantly occupied about us, or as one at all likely to adapt His acts in nature to our understandings. Here are two very different classes of men which we make very little effort in general to distinguish from one another. I admit at once that if God were making a communication to mankind, the utmost imaginable exigencies of the case would not make it appear probable to the one class that miraculous action of any kind would attend the message. I do not seek to conceal this. On the contrary, I give it all the prominence that fairness and philosophy require me to give it. But I now ask what would be the judgment of the opposite class? Would the same improbabilities present themselves to them? Any one can see at once that they would not. Nay, that such a thing, on such an occasion, would appear to such

men highly probable. I do not here speak of what may seem probable to ignorant or unenlightened men. I speak of the most intelligent, of the best informed, of the most profoundly philosophical, and who are all as capable of so believing and feeling about their Maker as the more ignorant and unenlightened;—may we not affirm, infinitely more so?—with a conviction at least infinitely less susceptible of being shaken or disturbed?—and my question about them is, Would they, if they knew that God was going to make a Revelation to us next month or next year—would they consider it as in any degree improbable that the Revelation would be attended with miraculous action? It might or it might not be so attended; but the question is, Would it, to such men, appear improbable that it should be so? I maintain that any reasonable man, whether Christian or not Christian, will instantly see that it would not.

And the Essayists do not contradict this. They frequently remark, as has been said, that in such cases everything depends on the anterior apprehensions and convictions of the parties. Nor does Hume deny it. He admits with us and with the Essayists that all the likelihood or unlikelihood of the thing to any person's mind depends wholly upon the previous experience of that person. One whose previous experience has never exhibited to

him a single conscious act in nature, is in a very different condition from one whose experience has never exhibited to him anything else. What would appear improbable to the one with regard to such an act, would certainly not appear improbable to the other, and the truth of the probability would, of course, depend upon the truth of the experience.

Again: supposing it to be quite clear that God *could* interrupt those laws by which He acts in nature, and quite probable that in making a superhuman Revelation, He would do so, can history be regarded as proof of the fact? Will a thoroughly enlightened man, under such circumstances, have any difficulty in believing an account of the superhuman action if he meets with it in the account of the superhuman Revelation? Here again I maintain that no impartial person (whether a Christian or not a Christian) will pretend to say that the mere superhuman nature of the fact presents to such a student the slightest grounds for doubt as to the truthfulness of the testimony. It is necessary to avoid all misapprehension of the question here proposed. I admit at once that historical evidence is not to be inconsiderately trusted in matters of religion any more than upon other subjects. I admit, also, that if a miracle were in itself physically impossible, the most trustworthy history in

the world could not be believed if it stated one. I admit that if, although possible enough, it was for any reason improbable that on the supposed occasion, the conscious personal Agent in nature should exhibit any supernatural action, testimony otherwise trustworthy may be set aside purely in consequence of the supernatural character of the alleged fact. All this I admit. What I ask is, Whether it is reasonable to disbelieve the historical statement, merely because it relates a miracle, when the possibility and the probability of the miracle are both already granted? Neither Hume nor the Essayists say one word in contradiction of what is here in itself so obvious. The Essayists only say that with their belief and assumptions respecting the physical possibility of the thing, they could not believe a miracle even if they saw it; which of course they could not, unless they first abandoned the misconception about physical causation.

Thus, then, we see that the whole question turns upon the one solitary point—the practicability or impracticability of there being any other but a physical cause—the practicability or impracticability of a Spirit or mind causing anything; and we shall the better understand this if we remember that the cosmical philosophers who thus think that a conscious Agent can cause nothing that occurs in

nature, think also and for the same reason the same thing of ourselves, and hold that none of us can cause anything, however conscious we are that we can do so.

The misconception originates, it has been seen, in the abuse of figurative language on this subject, and in the transfer thereby of causation from the mind that voluntarily and consciously acts, and to which alone causation belongs, to the acts themselves of the mind, which the mind voluntarily and consciously regulates by a fixed law or orderly connexion. Accordingly (and this is the most remarkable point in the denial of miracles) the only thing in the miracle thought to be physically impossible is anything constituting the act a conscious one—anything which makes it appear that there is design or intention upon God’s part in the act; for it must be remembered that the cosmical philosophers in question do not admit that there is design or intention in anything in nature—none, for instance, in the rotation of the earth upon its axis. This design or intention is the very essence of miraculous or supernatural action, and this is all that the Essayists and this class of cosmical students deny the possibility of. An extraordinary fact in nature, however extraordinary it may be, is not necessarily a miracle. It only becomes so when it

carries with it immediate evidence that it is the act of a conscious Agent. It is this peculiarity that is the miracle, and that the Essayists consider that nothing can render credible. If Tacitus and other writers contemporary with him, had stated that, in the year A.D. 99 at the vernal equinox they observed that the sun was twenty-four hours instead of twelve in his passage from east to west, there is no one who would not have believed the statement. The Essayists make no difficulty about that. All that they insist upon is, that any statement relative to the event involving the necessity of supposing it to be the act of God is not to be listened to; and this they insist upon, not because they do not believe that God acts consciously in nature (for we must not suppose that they doubt that), but because they hold it to be physically impracticable for Him to show us this in any way. That, in short, He has not the power to do so. They hold that even if we saw the miracle, and saw with our own eyes the most obvious facts proving in the most obvious manner that the event was a conscious act upon His part, we must not believe this proof—we must not believe that He *could* show us that it was so. We cannot of course doubt the fact that we see with our eyes, nor need we those that we read of in history. As far as they are mere facts, we can

reasonably accept them, however extraordinary they may be, as in the supposed instance just now given. But when the history states that these events, whether great or small, were conscious acts on the part of the Great and Sole Agent in Nature, and states anything that implies that, we must not, they tell us, listen to it; not, at least, if we pretend to anything like enlightenment or enlarged views. We may, for instance, they say, in the supposed case of Tacitus, believe the simple fact that the daylight lasted one day twice as long as the day before or the day after; but if the historian and his contemporaries describe it as the voluntary act of a conscious Agent, that is what we must not believe. If they state that at that time there was a general disbelief in Providence throughout the Empire, much greater than had ever previously existed; and that prior to the event many pious men in various parts of Europe were known to have offered up much prayer to God, imploring Him to evince His control over nature by prolonging the sun's course on that day to double its ordinary duration, and that all pious men were, in consequence of these prayers, expecting the event when it occurred—the Essayists tell us that if Tacitus and his contemporaries add this explanation of the matter, we must not believe it. We may, indeed, believe in

the prayers and in the expectation of good men, and in the state of irreligion prevalent throughout the Empire—ay, and in the stupendous event itself, and in the singular coincidence of the whole; but we must not combine these in such a way as to make it appear that the event was in consequence of the prayers, for God has, they tell us, no power to show Himself in nature in this way as a conscious Agent, this being what alone they describe as physically impossible, and as that which an enlarged, critical, inductive study of God's acts in nature tends powerfully to make us disbelieve! Why is it, we repeat, that these writers have observed such a strict silence as to the grounds for this extraordinary theory? which seems to consist only of the one great, staring, unexplained tenet—that God cannot possibly *exhibit to mankind* a conscious act! Since the Great Agent in nature is conscious and acts consciously, where lies the supposed difficulty in believing that He has the power of showing us that He does so, if He chooses to show it, and of doing this without its breaking up the universe? The Essayists admit that He can evince to us His conscious nature in our own minds and in our own thoughts, although not in the material world. They admit as fully as any of us that He does so; that He acts in compliance

with prayer, showing, evidently, that He is conscious of our requests ; and they admit that we constantly experience this superhuman action as the conscious act of God within ourselves ; that, in short, nothing is more common than this, and that such evidence of His Revelation to mankind is as strong as any amount of physical miracles could have been. It is only in His acts in the material universe that they pretend to meet with the impossibility they allude to. Yet what an incongruous principle this is of theirs—that our experience of His conscious action on our minds does not bring about the disorganization of nature, but that the same action, with regard to the smallest of material things, would instantly have that effect !

Such, then, is the belief—such the assumptions, and as they themselves tell us—the sole belief and sole assumptions upon this point, under the influence of which they proceed to the study of Scripture as they would to that of no other book, rejecting many of its statements *à priori*, and thereby disparaging the credibility of all the rest. Let us hope that they will think it worth while, out of regard for the vast interests of truth, to re-examine or disown a belief so inexplicable, and assumptions so little (as far as we can understand them) in accordance with the intelligence and even information which their work

evinces upon most other topics, and so fatally adverse to the welfare of the many, who, although they listen with avidity to the assumptions themselves, are either unfitted by education or disinclined by habit to seek for and discover the error of them. And the whole evil done—the whole real inaccuracy—lies in these assumptions; for however much the disclosures of geology and astronomy have been put forward to justify the theory of not interpreting Scripture literally and like any other book, it is clear that they give no warrant whatever for it. We all admit, even the Essayists themselves, that the existing language and existing information of the time being, upon scientific subjects, is all that properly belongs to a Revelation of things purely spiritual. But let it not be imagined that the assumptions in question are of trivial import, even apart from Scripture; for although, out of respect for the Essayists, I have endeavoured to speak of them as compatible with a belief in God, it is but too evident that they are not so. To hold that there is a conscious Agent in nature, but who has not the power of showing that He is such, and to hold that there is no conscious Agent at all in nature, is one and the same thing; the distinction frivolous and impossible to appreciate. Any evidence that we have of this Agent's being a conscious

One, is so also of that miraculous power which the Essayists have been induced to deny; and if there is not this evidence, we are obliged upon the principles of common sense to conclude that there is no such Agent. Again: if all is unconscious physical agency, and no Supreme conscious Being in nature can cause anything, this is all that is ever meant by saying that there is no God. If no Supreme conscious Being can act, *i. e.*, cause anything, then nothing that is done gives us the least reason to suppose that there is such a Being at all. The Essayists themselves will, I doubt not, be the foremost to see this, to them unexpected consequence of their misconceptions,—ay, and if superior to the injustice of their impatient critics, to acknowledge it and to expose it. The whole question turns upon the philosophy of causation,—a point which is now thoroughly mastered by enlightened men, notwithstanding all the confusion into which the Materialists have fallen respecting it, and have, what we may still more wonder at, led others to fall.

It is proper to advert here to one other misapprehension which exists on the part of the Essayists, and which, from its being supposed to invalidate the historical evidence in the present case, seems to have reconciled them, in some considerable degree, to their singular presumption against

all miracles whatever. They have allowed themselves to be entrapped by the not very profound remark that those who believe the Scripture miracles are reasoning in a circle ; that they first prove the doctrine from the miracles, and then prove the miracles from the doctrine. We exhort the Essayists to think this matter out for themselves. There is no reasoning in a circle here. There is hardly even the appearance of it. We do not pretend to prove the doctrine at all by the miracles,—and we pretend to prove the miracles but partially by the doctrine. The sole proof of the doctrine is the documents in which we find it, and that spirit of prayer without which we are apprised beforehand that we cannot believe it. The sole proof of the miracles is the same documents, and of course that prior enlightenment without which it is equally admitted beforehand that we cannot see their physical possibility. I say the same documents ; for the mere statement of a miracle, apart from the occasion on which it occurred, will constitute no proof of it. The Christian miracles having occurred in connexion with the disclosure of the Christian doctrines is what gives them credibility. All that we assert upon this point is that it is, *à priori*, more probable that a supernatural revelation should be attended with super-

natural events than that it should not. The evidence that it was so attended lies only in the record of it, and in the authenticity of that record. There is no *à priori* probability whatever that ordinary human teaching, or other human conduct, would be attended with miracles. A document, therefore, in which miracles were recorded as attending such, would require a large amount of corroboration. But if the teaching can be shown to be supernatural, or is, as in the present case, already known to be so—something above and beyond man’s or nature’s ordinary teaching, the improbability of the events then ceases. All we then require is ordinary history. This is not arguing that there must have been the superhuman events, since there is the superhuman doctrine, but only that there is no *à priori* probability against them, as would be the case if the doctrine were a mere human one. The only real evidence that we have of miracles in such a case is, I repeat, the historical one, combined, I am not unwilling to admit, with the previous condition of the reader’s understanding. As to the second allegation that we prove the doctrine from the miracles, is it not quite evident to all Christians that, with prayer and the documents alone, we should see the truth of the whole doctrine, even if not a single miracle were recorded? There is, then,

nothing here that can easily be mistaken for reasoning in a circle, nor the smallest force in the objection raised, upon these grounds, to the historical evidence that we have of the Christian miracles.

To conclude, then : the only argument that has been advanced by the Essayists against the literal interpretation of Scripture is the presence there of statements of miracles, in the form either of facts or prophecies ; and the only argument calculated to mislead either themselves or others that they assign for discrediting these statements is that we are mistaken in supposing that there is a Supreme, conscious, personal Agent in nature, who has the power of performing a physical miracle of any kind, however much He might wish to do so, or however great the occasion might be for one. There is really, therefore, no other argument adduced by the Essayists for the proposed theory of Scripture interpretation except this extraordinary opinion of the Materialists—extraordinary in its manifest contradiction of all fact and of all philosophy, and, if possible, still more extraordinary in the shallowness of the evidence upon which men otherwise not uneducated nor unintelligent have been willing to entertain it. That evidence, it cannot be too often repeated, is merely the proposition that all causation (or agency) is most probably material—that mind has no power

at all, and cannot act at all—that, therefore, this is the case also with the Divine Being whom we call “God.”

The mere object of the writers, in the theory of interpretation which they thus strangely defend, I pass over as utterly incompatible with the line of argument which they have adopted in vindication of this theory. That object is, they tell us, to enable more of the educated classes to be believers than now are so, and believers to be more earnest than they now are. But believers—in what? earnest—in what? Unless they can show, which is plainly impossible, that their line of argument leaves to these portions of the educated classes a Supreme, conscious, personal Agent in nature, as all the rest of the educated classes hold, what can they expect these portions to believe or to be earnest about? It is because we see that the Christian doctrines come from such a Being, that we have any belief at all, or any earnestness about them. But if, to increase our belief and our earnestness, we are taught that there is really no such Being, and could not possibly be such a Being—that what we know of God is something quite different from this—it is difficult to see how such instruction can produce the result here laid claim to, or any other result than that of exterminating whatever remnant of belief or of

earnestness we might have possessed. But the Essayists will see this themselves, and I need not enlarge upon it.

Nor need I say anything of the obvious fact that a State can only endow fixed and definite doctrines, fixedly and definitely expressed, and that consequently, under the proposed theory of interpretation for the language of religion, a National Church would be a simple impossibility.

The merely personal considerations also, connected with the position of most of the Essayists in the Church of England, I pass over, as what may, I think, be safely left to the ultimate feelings and reflections of such high-principled men as there can be no doubt that all the Essayists are. What is really matter of solicitude in this respect to their country and to their Church, and the only thing that is so, is, that the bitterness and injustice to which they have been exposed, should not paralyse the generous impulse which would prompt them instantly and openly to avow, as soon as seen, the inadvertence (for such alone it evidently is) through which they had been led by the inexact theories of less earnest men, to adopt, as fact and as philosophy, in connexion with our Faith, what they see upon closer examination, to be exactly the reverse of all philosophy and of all fact.

The three points I allude to, I pass over, as requiring no discussion. They are also wholly disconnected with the great question at issue between the Essayists and other Christians, and which it is our duty to determine before anything else, viz., the historical truth of the literal facts and doctrines stated in our Scriptures.

THE END.

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